



PHD

**Comparative Analysis Of Women's Autobiographical Narratives In English And Their Translations In Italian And French**

**J. Winterson, A.S. Byatt And Jamaica Kincaid: Three Case Studies**

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**Example 5**

My mother's favourite tale, apart from the tale of the teapot perhaps, was the tale of my father's act of severance. She herself, a girl from the working class, from a back-to-back house with no inside plumbing. ('Sugar': 223)

Le conte préféré de ma mère, mis à part le conte de la théière peut-être, était celui de l'acte de séparation de mon père. Elle, fille d'ouvrier, élevée dans une maison de coron sans installations sanitaires. ('Le Sucre': 33)

These examples revolve around the icon of the house as the pivotal *locus amoenus* of Byatt's memories and love: Blythe House (her grandparents' house where her father grew up), the house where the mother grew up and, finally, the parental house, where the author spent her childhood. What is striking is the extensive use of the French preposition of place 'dans' redesigning, in the French text, a new sense of motility and dynamism, which can be explained in terms of graphics and vectors. In Examples 2 and 3, the translation displaces the reader's attention from the vectorial movement of going or coming back to the house to a circular movement within the house. French readers can sense the narrating I's attempt to locate the projected image of herself, as a small child, within the house, or 'the secret inwardness of the house', as Byatt states a few pages later. Enclosure and inner recess characterizing the house as a symbol for inclusivity and circularity can also be found in Examples 4 and 5, where the mother and father's upbringings are portrayed as a felicitous time within the protective warmth of their parental houses.<sup>6</sup> To this effect, the French syntax is reorganized so as to present the house as an embracing space whose microcosm enfolds human passions, desires and, even, contradictory feelings. Whereas Byatt's father grew up 'in' a household full of passions and, at times, cold attitudes, Byatt's mother grew up 'in' a house ruled by a strong and loving father. 'Elevée dans' in Example 5 reshapes the original significance of the English 'house' by attributing to it values of protection, internal warmth and security (as further reinforced in Example 6).

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<sup>6</sup> Gaston Bachelard depicts houses in terms of maternal warmth and felicitous space. In *La Poétique de l'espace*, Bachelard claims that when we refer to houses we stress their protective value because 'ces valeurs d'*abri* sont si simples, si profondément enracinées dans l'inconscient qu'on les retrouve plutôt par une simple évocation que par une description minutieuse' (1957: 31, my italics).

These feelings of warmth and protection are recreated and personified by the mother herself once she gets married. In Example 4, the mother, as the ‘angel in the house’, turns an impersonal house into a ‘home’ with moral values of integrity and love. These values are emblemized by the French synecdoche ‘foyer’, conjured up out of a process of nominalization of the English adjective ‘domestic’. While reducing the level of abstraction inherent in ‘domestic’, the French ‘foyer’ narrows down the semantic field of domesticity to the central part of the home, its heart and core, namely the hearth. Hence, while the focal point is retained, the French adds something specifically concrete to the sentence: both the image of the hearth and the motility typical of the mother-daughter transitional space. This kind of rendering is in fact the outcome of a crisscrossed transfer, defined as a chiasmus, a trope which will be explored in depth in Chapter Six, or ‘inverse transposition’ (Vinay and Darbelnet 1995: 105). According to this, the French ‘la chaleur’ and ‘du foyer’ are the result of a grammatical transposition which rearranges the same parts of the original text in a specular (or chiasmic) order. This crisscrossed translation reproduces linguistically the subterranean mechanisms of ‘Le Sucre’ which, like a mirror, reflects the above-mentioned eye movement from the daughter to the mother and back. It also locates the protective warmth of the house within an icon, the hearth, which signifies par excellence the woman, or metonymically, her womb.

Hence, the circular movement created by the preposition of place ‘dans’, the cumulative effect produced by its extensive use, the chiasmic translations and the process of nominalization of the synecdoche of the hearth reinforce the iconicity of the enclosed space of the house as a metaphor for the mother or, in Winnicott’s words, the ‘environment mother’ (Doane and Hodges 1992: 20). Winnicott expanded the concept of ‘object mother’ to include a more localized ‘environment mother’. He explained this concept by means of a chiasmus. For him environment mother and maternal environment are interchangeable. The mother is not only an ‘object’, namely the ‘owner of the part object that may satisfy the infant’s urgent needs’, she is also ‘the person who wards off the unpredictable and who actively

provides care in handling and in general management' (Winnicott quoted in Doane and Hodges 1992: 20). By stressing the dual nature of what he defines as infant-care, Winnicott sees the mother as a pervasive presence who moves around the house to handle<sup>7</sup> the unpredictable requests of the child and who charges the house with positive connotations of love, care and protection. The French translation of 'my mother's pervasive anxiety' ('Sugar': 242)<sup>8</sup> with the relative clause: 'l'anxiété de ma mère qui se répandait partout' ('Le Sucre': 60) renders effectively the mother's all-encompassing love. In French both the verb 'répandre' (to spread – used for example for liquid) and the localizer 'partout' (everywhere) give a sense of maternal fluid omnipresence. The whole house, therefore, becomes a metaphor for the maternal embrace and personifies the mother's arms and empathetic warmth.

In light of all these examples, it becomes more and more evident that the French translation empowers the aesthetic and personal value of the mother by operating spatial rearrangements. It shortens the proxemic space between mother and daughter during the mirror stage, it strengthens the link between the mother and the house and, as a consequence, it empowers the child's perspective from within the comfort of the maternal space. Example 6 can be considered as paradigmatic in this respect:

### Example 6

I associated the secret inwardness of the houses, de Hooch's houses even more than Vermeer's, with my mother's domestic myth, necessary tasks carried out in clear light, in their own confined but meaningful spaces. In my memory, I have superimposed a de Hooch on the Vermeer, for I remember in the picture a small blonde Dutch child, with a cap and serious expression, close to the woman's

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<sup>7</sup> 'Handling' is for Winnicott part of an 'environmental function' that follows the primary stage of 'holding'. While 'holding' corresponds to the satisfaction of the primary needs of the child, 'handling' expands the first stage embracing the satisfaction of its secondary needs as well as a process of 'integration' and 'inter-relation' with the environment (Winnicott 2000: 145).

<sup>8</sup> The author does not explain clearly why the mother was anxious one time they all visited Blythe House. Byatt describes the house as she remembers it as a child, namely as an enormous unfriendly space with a dark kitchen. Considering the mother's myth of 'angel of the hearth', her anxiety could be interpreted as an expression of love, a desire to turn an unfriendly house into a more welcoming space for everybody to enjoy.

skirts, who is my small blonde self, gravely paying attention, as my mother would have liked. ('Sugar': 235)

J'associais le caractère intime et secret des maisons, celles de De Hooch plus encore que de Vermeer, au mythe du foyer selon ma mère, celui des tâches nécessaires accomplies en pleine lumière, dans les endroits resserrés mais signifiants qui sont les leurs. Dans mon souvenir, j'ai superposé un De Hooch au Vermeer, car je me rappelle dans le tableau une fillette hollandaise blonde, en bonnet, avec une expression sérieuse, qui se tient dans les jupes de la femme, et qui est moi, fillette blonde, attentive et grave, comme ma mère l'eût aimé. ('Le Sucre': 49-50)

The originality of this description lies in a series of juxtapositions and reminiscences. Not only does Byatt superimpose a Vermeer on a De Hooch, but she also projects the images of her infant self and her mother onto the child and the woman in the picture. In French, these juxtapositions unchain additional associations which confer even more importance on the mother figure because they link the intimacy of De Hooch's houses to the 'mythe du foyer selon ma mère' and the intersubjective warmth of the shared mother-daughter space to the poetic description in the incipit. This is due to the localizer 'dans' which modulates the perception of the maternal 'enclosure' or 'environment' shortening the distance (or proximity) between the mother and the child. To be in or inside the mother's skirts is not as 'normal' as to be next to them, because adolescence should be characterized by a gradual separation from the parental figure. In French, however, there is no detachment from the mother's body but, again, vertiginous proximity. The preposition 'dans' therefore overthrows normality by relocating time and again the child inside the embrace of the maternal space. This shift allows the French narrator to retrieve the mirror as a constitutive stage of her aesthetic formation and the significance of the mother-daughter relationship at an aesthetic and personal level. Like mirrors, paintings have special powers because they raise self-awareness: 'when people look at the picture what they see is not just a picture: they might in fact see themselves' (Bacon quoted in Winnicott 2000: 148).

The next example explains the importance attributed to the preposition ‘in’ and, by association, the accurate choice of the preposition ‘dans’ in French. It also clarifies the narrator’s perspective and emotional attachment to the house and the mother, whose strength and intensity justify intertextual resonances and the attribution of autofictional traits to the French narrator of ‘Le Sucre’.

### Example 7

My mother said that this was a black time of his life, and that he became very ill, frightening his mother once or twice by fainting into the coal bucket. The “into” was part of her graphic style. As a little girl I had a clear vision of his pale limbs somehow telescoped and contracted into this dirty receptacle. (‘Sugar’: 224)

Ma mère disait que ce fut une période noire dans la vie de mon père, qu’il tomba gravement malade, effrayant sa mère une ou deux fois en s’évanouissant dans le seau à charbon. Le «dans» était typique du style imagé de ma mère. Petite fille, j’avais une vision claire de mon père dont, en quelque sorte, les membres pâles se télescopaient, se contractaient dans ce récipient malpropre. (‘Le Sucre’: 33)

The English ‘into’ is part of the mother’s graphic and descriptive style, a style defined as imaginative and, at the same time, detailed. ‘Dans’, as direct translation of ‘into’, is, therefore, strictly related to the maternal discourse, a discourse which is practical and, at the same time, spatial. It is the mother who, with her specific sense of direction and modality of spatialization, entertains and amuses her audience. It is the mother who teaches Byatt to make good use of localizers, spatial markers and metaphors, in the most effective, affective<sup>9</sup> and photographic manner. In this light, the French spatial localizers reproduce reality and memories in a highly realistic or graphic way and foster positive emotional reactions in the addressee, who is in the first place Byatt-the-daughter-the-narratee (to whom the maternal stories are addressed) and, ultimately, the reader of ‘Le Sucre’. Along with the narrator, the French reader too is drawn into the comfort of the maternal language and intersubjective space.

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<sup>9</sup> Here I use the adjective ‘affective’ as explained by Sándor G. J. Hervey and Ian Higgins: ‘*an emotive effect worked on the addressee by the choice of expression, and which forms part of its overall meaning. The expression does not merely denote its referent, but also hints at some attitude of the speaker/writer to the addressee*’ (1992: 104, authors’ italics).

The house has also been used as an icon in the autobiography/autofiction debate, especially by Lejeune and Doubrovsky, to situate in topographical terms the centre and the margins of autobiographical writing. Despite the fact that the house has always been one of the most favourite sites of exploration in this genre, Lejeune uses it as an icon to dismiss Doubrovsky's theorizations of autofiction. Autofiction is, according to Lejeune, an untenable 'cas' (case) and, therefore, an empty 'case', namely a hut or a rudimentary abode. By means of a pun, Lejeune associates autofiction to 'une case aveugle' (Lejeune 1993: 6) or a 'blind hut' which, although odd, has a strong meaning. To be blind is a deterrent for the autobiographer who intends to start his writing with a physiognomic description of his image in the mirror. With this metaphor, Lejeune therefore dismisses autofiction as an impossible, invalid and absolutely fictional genre which cannot house autobiographical memories. Lejeune then expands the metaphor by depicting the house, namely autofiction, as isolated with no life or sites of attraction. Its windows have been barred to keep squatters out. There are no curtains. The house, which has a rudimentary and almost primitive aspect, cannot be inhabited because nobody is there. 'Real' autobiography, celebrating the romantic individuality of its own (male) writer and claiming the veracity of its own words, is situated, according to Lejeune, in a welcoming garden where the writer enjoys its free and open space. A space that is, as Inger Birkeland (2005) claims, typical of male territorializations of space.

In his defense, Doubrovsky objects to Lejeune's dismissal of autofiction as a genre that has no right to be considered as such. He does not reject the icon of the blind house, but elaborates on this highlighting, ultimately, that it is a space that validates autofiction. It is in the light of these elaborations that we can appreciate the French translation of 'Le Sucre' and understand its autofictional nature in greater depth. If the house is blind, it is because, in Doubrovsky's view, it reflects a sensory ambiguity upon which autofiction is founded: 'c'est de l'écoute de l'autre que la vérité revient (advient) dans le discours où le sujet tâche à se saisir' (1988: 65). As I have explained in the opening pages of this chapter, autofiction problematizes 'la norme classique de l'écrivain au miroir' (Doubrovsky 1988: 66)

by turning to dialogism. Contrary to Lejeune, Doubrovsky highlights the importance, in autofictional writing, of intersubjective exchange founded upon sensory perceptions. While imagining the narrator as the analyst and the hero as the analyzed, Doubrovsky shifts the whole debate towards new theorizations of autobiography. What is important is not whether to comply with autobiographical pacts, nor whether to sing the solitude of our own past. What is important is to split the romantic individuality of the classical autobiographer to house, within the space of this gap, a new sensory dimension, namely the voice, the sight and the truth of the m/other. This truth is not only fictional or imaginary, as Doubrovsky claims. It is subconscious and has to be looked for in the interstice between 'ÇA' and 'MOI' (1988: 66). In Doubrovsky's theoretical essay, the ideal autobiographer employs the demonstrative 'ça' to point at the invisible other. Like Doubrovsky, 'Le Sucre' plays with the ambiguity between other and m/other, object and subject of vision, encapsulated within the warmth of the maternal embrace.<sup>10</sup>

The analysis of this section shows that 'Le Sucre' is not (only) an autobiographical short story, it becomes a privileged space for experimental writing which in line with the literary debates of its receiving culture gives voice and body to the author's most intimate desires. It genders the intersubjective and metaphorical realm of the text by highlighting the personal and aesthetic role of women in autobiographical writing. By shortening the proximity between mother and child, by enhancing the intersubjective nature of the mother-daughter space, by increasing the significance of the house as maternal icon of protective warmth and by intensifying the charge of the maternal graphic style, 'Le Sucre' celebrates the role of the autofictional writer and the imaginary encounter with the m/other. However, as in Byatt's work the maternal 'environment' embraces houses and enclosures, internal and external spaces, can we claim that such preliminary conclusions concerns all spatial dimensions in 'Le Sucre'? As underlined in the introduction, the mother's stories, set in familiar and exotic places full of ecstatic

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<sup>10</sup> For the importance that the mother played in Doubrovsky's life see Jean-François Chiantaretto (1992: 177)



moments of happiness, open the horizons of the autobiographical narrative onto other spaces, unlimited and unbounded, beyond and outside the setting of the narrative space. They portray a foreign world that Byatt (still a child wrapped up in home comfort) has never seen before. It seems therefore logical to analyze such spaces in order to achieve a balanced and comprehensive understanding of the aesthetic and personal role of the mother both in 'Sugar' and 'Le Sucre'. If in the French version the intersubjective mother-daughter space is enhanced, how are the exotic spaces of the mother's stories rendered in French? And how do they influence the daughter's artistic and geographical sense of self?

#### 4.4 Open Spaces and the Semiotic *Chora* in the Mother's Tales

The need to explore the mother's exotic spaces is also dictated by some choices adopted by the French translator at the beginning of the text. At the end of Example 1, in French, the mother is blamed for telling stories full of invented evidence of chimerical iniquity. While the English narrator keeps the tone of the accusation as dry and impersonal as possible by claiming that the content of those stories is 'non-existent', the French narrator, in keeping with my analysis of the whole extract, shows more passion, involvement and imagination. She does not depict the content of her mother's stories as insubstantial, empty or vacuous, namely full of some sort of wickedness that does not practically exist. On the contrary she describes her stories as fertile, rich and fruitful. Their richness and fullness come from the evidence (or 'preuves') that the mother provides to corroborate her argument and to lead her audience towards fanciful worlds, worlds full of chimeras, imaginary sins and mysterious crimes. Her stories, in French, are therefore projected into a realm of fantasy which, despite being utopian, is no less real, authentic or convincing than the evidence that the mother invents to substantiate her imagination. 'Preuves' and 'chimériques' therefore do not reduce the reality of the mother's stories, they enhance their fantastic realism which fosters the daughter's explorative desire. They also invite the French reader (as well as the scholar) to travel across time and space along the creative drive of the maternal *fiat*.

In order to analyze the mother's fantastic worlds, their interconnections and/or possible reconfigurations in French, I now move to the third category of space in Maclean's framework: *chronotope* (Maclean 1988: 112), a term she borrows from Bakhtin. Bakhtin's chronotope is 'a *semiotic* space-time entity which interrelates with other such entities, both intra- and inter-textual' (Bakhtin quoted in Maclean 1988: 112, my italics). According to this model, therefore, space is not mono-dimensional, it is a three-dimensional, prolific and fertile terrain generated by the interconnections of different spaces that create Maclean's idea of 'interspatiality' (1988: 112). Maclean sees 'interspatiality' as an enrichment of Bakhtin's chronotope and, specifically, as a confluence of 'references to fictional and mythological spaces' (1988: 112) and of 'historical and geographical allusions' that 'may add a whole extra dimension to a text' (1988: 112). As the mother's stories proliferate along different memory axes and space-time lines resuscitating fragments of juxtaposed, superimposed, displaced and condensed personal and family past and places, I believe this approach can prove fruitful. While it enables the dissection and reconstruction of the interconnections between spaces and fantasy, anamnesis and desire in Byatt's work, it will also help to unearth their artistic and aesthetic value. If the previous two sections have highlighted the relevance of the French mother's word for the personal and artistic formation of the daughter, this section will shed light on the nature and style of this word. How does the mother describe unfamiliar places and spaces? How are her words echoed by the narrator? And how do they affect Byatt's narrative style in English and French?

To answer these questions, I will explore the semiotic dimension of the maternal proliferation of spaces not only in the linguistic sense, as Bakhtin might have intended, but also, and especially, in the psychoanalytical, Kristevan, sense, with the aim of assessing whether the semiotic is more prominent and visible in one text than in the other. To this effect, I will initially retrieve subterranean textual movements in the French translation by investigating compensations and semantic transpositions. These movements will unearth the maternal interspatiality and the

semantic interconnections between the mother's chimerical spaces and the French narrative style of those exotic descriptions. Finally, I shall explore how the French translation succeeds in representing linguistically the impact of the mother's 'interspatial' stories on the daughter's narrative sensibility, with particular attention to metaphors.

### Example 8

My mother did not expatiate on Gladys, whom she clearly disliked. I can't remember how old I was when she first told me these few facts – old enough to have read some Lawrence as well as suffering *Jane Eyre*, old enough to imagine a romantic red-haired girl in a long serge skirt running through fields, hiding behind hedges, with courage and fear, to a place of secret and absolute emotion. ('Sugar': 222)

Ma mère ne s'étendait pas sur le sujet de Gladys que, visiblement, elle n'aimait pas. Je ne me rappelle pas quel âge je pouvais avoir lorsqu'elle me raconta ces quelques faits, – j'étais assez grande pour avoir lu des Lawrence, ainsi que *Jane Eyre* et ses souffrances, assez grande pour imaginer une romanesque rousse courant à travers champs en longue jupe de serge, se cachant derrière les haies, courageuse, apeurée, reprenant sa course vers le lieu où l'attendait l'émotion secrète et absolue. ('Le Sucre': 31)

Gladys married a coalminer but then divorced him 'with considerable firmness once the immediate need for respectability was past' ('Sugar': 222). She is clearly a rebellious woman who refused to comply with social norms, patriarchal expectations and decorum. She was attracted by open spaces and solitude and, after divorcing her husband, she spent 'several years in a caravan perched on the North Yorkshire coast' ('Sugar': 223). She dressed in an extravagant way and did not follow 1950s fashion. She had 'a great unruly mass of wiry gingery hair' (Sugar: 222) and was, most probably, unattractive to men. She used to buy unnecessary and extravagant presents which the mother thought were 'silly' ('Sugar': 223). She was sometimes violent, threatened 'a neighbour with a garden fork' ('Sugar': 223) and invaded the mother's peaceful domestic space with unwelcome 'incursion[s]' ('Sugar': 222). Yet, there is something special, almost dream-like, about that 'romantic' red-haired girl. And even more so in French which, with the term 'romanesque', highlights Gladys's romantic but also romance-like and fictional qualities. Are her incursions expressions of the

mother's chimerical iniquity? Is she part of the maternal imaginary world? The French version seems to unearth a secret correspondence between the two women which enables us to understand more the mother's passion for storytelling and open spaces.

In Example 8, the English employs quite an unusual reporting verb, 'to expatiate', which, used in the negative form, reveals a tension. The mother's spatial approach to storytelling is ambiguous at this stage in English. The negative 'did not expatiate' might encourage the English reader to see the mother as unwilling to use spatial metaphors or depict open spaces in her stories. This impression might be at least partially corrected by the complement 'on Gladys', implying that the mother did not like to expatiate specifically on Gladys (for personal reasons) but that she liked to expatiate on other subjects. This initial impression could also be modified by subsequent textual descriptions of open-air spaces and of places belonging to a remote familial past (related, as we shall see, to Sylvia and Lucy). The ambiguity inherent in the English verbal form is visibly resolved in French by a series of compensations that recuperate the denotative and the connotative sense of 'to expatiate' together with the mother's inclination to explore remote and fictional spaces in storytelling.

Compensation appears to be the engine of the French translation, guaranteeing mobility of meaning, rearrangement of textual message and enhancement of maternal aesthetic values. The first compensatory mechanism in this passage is 'compensation by splitting', which 'may be resorted to, if the context allows, in cases where there is no single TL word that covers the same range of meaning as a given ST word' (Hervey and Higgins 1992: 39). The denotative meaning of 'to expatiate', namely 'to walk about at large, to roam without restraint; to move about freely in space, wander at will',<sup>11</sup> is recuperated partially by the semantics

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<sup>11</sup> *Oxford English Dictionary Online*

<http://www.oed.com.ezp2.bath.ac.uk/search?searchType=dictionary&q=expatiate> [accessed on 10 May 2010].

of the French verb 's'étendre' (to spread out) and partially by the unrestrained proliferation of verbs in the following French sentence. The French spatial metaphor 's'étendre' evokes, like 'to expatiate', an almost pantheistic omnipresence that covers the extension of the maternal imaginary of open spaces. What is missing in this translation is the sense of freedom inherent in the English verb 'to expatiate', which is, subsequently, recovered and textualized by the French sentence following the dash. In this sentence 'courant' and 'se cachant' (describing the girl's sense of freedom in the fields), are direct translations of the English 'running' and 'hiding', while the third verbal expression, 'reprenant sa course vers', has been added to expand the English vectorial shifter 'to' indicating direction and tension towards a place of absolute emotion. This verbal proliferation (involving also the French 'l'attendait') emphasizes the freedom inherent both in Gladys's unrestrained sense of adventure (lacking in 's'étendre') and in the mother's unrestrained syntax, expressive style and kinaesthetic word, an evocative and vibrant word reminiscent of explorations of absolute emotions and unfamiliar spaces.

But why do we claim that the unrestrained syntactic choice of the French text in Example 8 recalls the mother's expressive style? After all, phrases and words located after the dash, as Chapter Six illustrates, are part of narrative asides performed by specific voices and entities, different from the general narrating I and requiring to be textually marked by the dash. In this case, the entity (and point of view) in charge of the telling is undoubtedly the daughter's narrative 'je' which claims to mingle facts, memories and literary imagination. It could be argued, however, that if Byatt mentions Gladys's story, it is only because she has learned about it via her mother's stories, which were therefore bound to leave their imprint upon Byatt's literary imagination. At this point in both texts, it is clear that, contrary to Freudian psychology, Byatt is not introduced to unknown places by her father. She in fact states that 'he [father] never I think described her [Gladys], or her acts, to me' ('Sugar': 223). Byatt's imagination is led to explore

the unknown via her mother who, as Byatt often maintains, satisfied her daughter's desire for reading: 'I do remember that she [mother] fed the hunger for reading, there was always a book and another book and another' ('Sugar': 234). As a consequence it could be claimed that the description of Gladys is, in actual fact, Free Indirect Speech echoing the mother's words, flights of the imagination and, possibly, subconscious attraction to Gladys's free life (that, we are told, she led happily after breaking her stifling marital vows). Yet, despite being supported by contextual information in both texts, this interpretation reveals itself to be relevant and strong only when applied to the French text.

In the English original of Example 8 the clause 'running through fields, hiding behind hedges, with courage and fear, to a place of secret and absolute emotion' does not particularly reproduce the mother's style which Byatt had defined as florid and beautiful (in Example 1) and, later on, 'indisciplined' ('Sugar': 215). At a closer look, it can even be claimed that the style of these words is the absolute opposite of the mother's 'indisciplined rush of speech' ('Sugar': 215), because the pairs of words (or hendiadys) around specific sets of grammatical categories, namely verbs ('running' and 'hiding'), nouns ('courage' and 'fear') and adjectives ('secret' and 'absolute'), reveal rhetorical organization, balance, moderation and linguistic control. The expression 'indisciplined rush of speech', defining the 'unruly' mother's personality and unorthodox verbal style, is, however, translated in French with 'débordements de paroles' ('Le Sucre', 24) which alters the whole perspective and interpretation of Example 8. Unlike 'indisciplined', 'débordements' does not express disobedience, disorganization and disorder. Despite the fact that it continues to depict the mother's aesthetics as unruly, uncontrollable and unmanageable, 'débordements', with its liquid connotations, suggests a visual flood of words identifiable with the magnified proliferation of verbs in French. Extending the syntactic length of Example 8 and multiplying its verbal load somatizes, therefore, the mother's verbosity, excess and attraction to open spaces, movement and vitality. In French, the mother's stories are not verbal expressions of a chaotic personality. They are liquid, overflowing, overspilling and, consequently, feminine. The almost intersemiotic compensation by splitting

(involving different linguistic layers, namely semantics as well as syntax) brings about other stylistic effects exclusively specific to the French text.

The French text, transversally run through by compensations and semantic reorganizations, highlights the maternal fascination for Gladys's evasions and strengthens the link between the mother, the daughter and Gladys. Both 'to expatiate' and 'indisciplined rush of speech' set in motion compensation mechanisms which in French retrieve parts of their semantics (that are not rendered by their direct equivalents) and intensify reverberations between the extravagant personalities of the female members of the family myth. 'To expatiate' evokes ideas of spatiality *and* breaking boundaries, which are not simultaneously rendered by 's'étendre'. 'S'étendre' in fact conveys notions of spatiality, as shown above, but not of breaking boundaries which are etymologically inherent in the semantic constitution of 'to expatiate'. Etymologically 'to expatiate' embraces concepts of border-crossing because the verb comes from the Latin *exspatiari* which means 'to move beyond one's usual bounds'.<sup>12</sup> Ideas of border-crossing are then retrieved by compensation by the morphology of 'débordements' which recalls maternal notions of overflowing and going over borders. Hence, if the expression 'débordements', with its implied idea of breaking borders, leads French readers to identify Gladys with the secret double of the mother's self, the adjective 'indisciplined' confirms this association. The concept of disobedience, originally characterizing the mother figure and inherent in the English 'indisciplined', is conferred upon other members of the family (Gladys included) who, as the French claims, had a 'passion indisciplinée' ('Le Sucre': 30). This expression which translates 'unmanageable passion' ('Sugar': 221) is used by the narrator to introduce the personality of all the family members. Moving meaning and personal aspects across the female characters, as if they were interchangeable, confirms therefore their mutual attraction and

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<sup>12</sup> *The Concise Oxford English Dictionary, Oxford Reference Online*  
 (<http://www.oxfordreference.com/views/ENTRY.html?subview=Main&entry=t23.e19366>)  
 [accessed 2 October 2011].

specular identities. Despite their different social extraction and objectives in life, they share 'furious energy' ('Sugar': 221), mobility and desires for freedom and evasion.

Unlike the English original, the French translation, therefore, enhances Byatt's ventriloquism, Free Indirect Speeches, maternal desires and aesthetic legacy. Narrative layers, entities, voices and roles are enriched and juxtaposed within the French textual space, celebrating verbal and imaginary interconnections, proximity and exchange. This space engages with and reveals the mother's psychology via the daughter's words and literary imagination. The Free Indirect Speech, exclusively created in the French text, strengthens the link not only between the primal narrator, the mother, and the narratee, Byatt, but also with the object of narration, namely Gladys's desire to explore fields beyond hedges, and open spaces. Gladys's sense of freedom and love for the wild countryside is shared by the mother and the daughter who are both attracted by Gladys's eagerness to escape, 'expatiate' and discover places of absolute emotion. Thanks to a number of semantic transpositions, Gladys and the mother become more visibly the magnifying glass of one another. On the one hand, the mother's proliferations, spatial language and imaginary spaces reflect metaphorically and literally Gladys's spatial desire for freedom and rebellion. On the other, Gladys's attraction for freedom, openness and evasion substantiates the mother's spatial chimeras and unmanageable language. Neither respects norms: one rejects social norms, the other aesthetic norms structuring male-authored texts and defining traditional literary canons. Their reflected/reflecting images enhance their reciprocal and secret attraction. In this light, despite the fact that the French text continues to state that the mother did not expand on Gladys much, it does not minimize the mother's spatial imagery and approach to storytelling. It also unearths her desire for freedom and her subconscious fascination for self-expression and self-determination. The place of secret and absolute emotion of Example 8 could well be interpreted as Gladys's free life after her divorce which was only publicly contested but intimately and privately supported by the French mother.



All these alterations have an important impact on the interspatialization of the French text, which complicates spatial references by superimposing contextual and imaginary realms. As Maclean claims, ‘interspatiality, like intertextuality, is the category most subject to reader variation in the final construction of the text’ (1988: 116). French readers are invited to listen to the mother’s voice, to uncover her secret desires and to move across female chimerical spaces open to mobility, fluidity, excess,<sup>13</sup> violations and explorations. They are also invited to discover the connections between the mother’s stories, the language Byatt uses and the subjects they describe. Apart from Gladys, Byatt tells the story of other family members who were all ‘extraordinarily gifted’ (‘Sugar’: 221) and who ‘carried out acts of considered rebellion and escape’ (‘Sugar’: 223). Unlike the men who remained confined to one place, the women moved away fascinated by open spaces: Lucy ‘had been ravished by the open spaces and free life of Australia’ (‘Sugar’: 225) and Sylvia ‘had fallen in love, on that fated world cruise, with someone [...] in South Africa’ (‘Sugar’: 227). All these stories are, as Byatt claims, ‘again [...] my mother’s version’ and they represented ‘my mother’s favourite tale’ (‘Sugar’ 223), because like Gladys’s they give voice to female courage. They express admiration for those who attempted to infringe the containment within the home, familial bonds, language and even the body, to which women, as Irigaray claims, have been subjected for centuries. Irigaray in fact states that women’s enclosure in the house, ‘a house in which man arranges his possessions to satisfy his desire to substitute for the lost security of the womb’ (Young 2001: 260-61), has prevented them from moving and breathing freely. Gladys, Lucy and Sylvia embody the female courage, emancipation and ambition that women have and use ‘to construct, bit by bit, the envelope of air of our terrestrial space [...] to become birds [...] and mobility in the air’ (Irigaray quoted in Berry 1992: 260). Hence, they are the embodiment of the mother’s chimeras and desires for evasion from a family normality which ‘she [the mother] claimed to be happiness’ (‘Sugar’: 223) but which she ‘suffered with savage resentment,

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<sup>13</sup> See, for example, how the French old-fashioned metaphor ‘abondant dans son sens’ in Example 1 also conveys the idea of abundance.

and expected payment for, from those she cared for' ('Sugar': 223). Gladys, the most extreme of the three female protagonists of the maternal tales and the very first to be described by Byatt in her narrative, encourages the French reader to reconstruct all these secret associations, associations which lead to the mother's heart.

My next step is to find out whether the French sensitization to open spaces can coexist with the text's strong concern with limited spaces, the metaphor of the womb, the intersubjective space and the maternal enclosure which I have highlighted in the previous section. Recourse to Julia Kristeva's 'semiotic' will help us resolve this apparent contradiction. In 'Place Names', Kristeva associates Winnicott's transitional space (or 'potential space', as she also calls it) with the semiotic, or semiotic *chora*, a concept that she has already introduced in *Revolution in Poetic Language* (1984, orig. 1974). Like Winnicott, Kristeva illustrates her theory in spatial terms with particular attention to its intersubjective nature: 'this is to say that the semiotic *chora* is no more than the place where the subject is both generated and negated, the place where his unity succumbs before the process of charges and stases that produce him' (Kristeva 1984: 28, author's italics). Like the transitional space, the semiotic *chora* is an in-between space, a place shared by mother and child before the hiatus, the thetic cut, the separation (or, as we shall see in Chapter Five, the negation) of the child from the maternal body/object. In my previous analysis, I made use of the transitional space rather than the analogous semiotic *chora* because the former is more language-oriented (focusing on demonstratives and deictics). The semiotic *chora* is, instead, a more philosophical, indefinite and complex concept that, as Kristeva stresses, escapes definition, representation and practical application. Therefore, it would have been too theoretical for my earlier pragmatic analysis. However, it is also a malleable concept that can be fruitfully applied to the femininity of the above-mentioned French interspaces.

As Kristeva tends to situate the *chora* within the 'pre-syllable, pre-word, *amorphous*' (Kristeva 1984: 239) stage by focusing on its fluidity and musicality,

some critics have been inclined to associate it with pre-verbal manifestations such as the maternal voice and laughter rather than with, for instance, spatial projections and symbols. Kristeva, indeed, praises laughter because it can be clearly distinguished from all other forms of structured representation such as '*the symbolic*' (1984: 24, author's italics), namely language with its syntactic prearranged dispositions. Despite this, Kristeva still sees space as a dimension capable of conceptualizing and territorializing (even if temporarily) the *chora*. She, in fact, illustrates this concept with such spatial metaphors and territorial expressions as 'semiotic space' (1984: 27), 'rhythmic space' (1984: 26) and 'zone' with 'relative and transitory borders' (1984: 87). Therefore, despite the fact that Kristeva insists that the *chora* can never be captured or 'posited', she states that it can be 'designated' and given 'a topology' (1984: 26). The *topos* or site is not necessarily inward (like the womb). It can also be an outward space: a paradoxical and aporetic dimension that Kristeva inherits from Plato's *chora*. In *Timaeus*, Plato described the *chora* as a 'receptacle' (Grosz 1995: 93) for the origin of the universe with undeniable maternal and feminine connotations that Plato acknowledged in view of its reproductive and nurturing functions. However, because of the infinite dimension of its product, the universe, Plato's *chora* was also an open and outward space.<sup>14</sup> Of course Plato did not use the *chora* for psychoanalytical purposes in order to study the mother-daughter relationship. He mainly employed it to illustrate the birth of the universe and its correlated worldly reality. Similarly, Kristeva attributes to the *chora* openness and spatial imprecision but feminizes its nature in particular and space in general. While for Winnicott, the transitional space is, as we have seen, a limited, circumscribed and intimate place, for Kristeva this same space is bounded and unbounded.

Applying Kristeva's semiotic *chora* to the mother's fictionalized spaces resolves our initial apparent contradiction. Gladys's wild countryside, Lucy's Australian open spaces and Sylvia's South Africa can indeed be interpreted as the mother's fictional and imaginary reconfigurations of Kristeva's unlimited semiotic space

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<sup>14</sup> Plato in fact used the Greek word *χώρα* (*chora*) (meaning 'space') as a synonym for receptacle.

because, like the latter, they are fluid, off-stage, extratextual and unbounded. They are real and fictional, located in the same ‘indeterminate locus’ and ‘extra-pictorial dimension’ (Berry 1992: 253) as Kristeva’s *chora*. However, what is crucial is that the maternal interspaces in the French text are neither exclusively inward nor exclusively outward. They embrace intersubjective warmth and public courage, real and imaginary places of ideological and political contestation, places which are populated by marginal<sup>15</sup> and eccentric characters. In this light, intersubjective and open spaces are not diametrically opposed. They are, instead, contiguous and situated simultaneously here and there, between the narrators (mother and daughter) and in another world, a ‘placeless place’ (Foucault 1986: 24), a ‘place of alterity’ (Kristeva 1984: 47): a fabrication generating like a mirror a series of illusory reflections of the self where the self is not. In ‘Le Sucre’, this visual and visionary aspect is rendered by deferral by Byatt’s words in Example 8 where she defines Gladys’s memories as ‘vue de mon imagination’ rather than simply ‘imagination’. Together with the adverb ‘visiblement’, ‘vue’ stresses the importance of vision/s and Kristeva’s ‘fantasies’ (1984: 49).

The advantage and value of the French translation over the English original is that it unearths the semiotic in the mother’s tales from a linguistic point of view. For instance, all the members of the family myth (among whom Gladys, Lucy and Sylvia), who populate the mother’s stories, are depicted as ‘débordants de vie’ (‘Le Sucre’, 29), which, unlike its equivalent ‘vital’ (‘Sugar’: 221), recalls the maternal fluidity (‘débordements de paroles’) and the *chora*’s ‘transitory borders’ (Kristeva 1984: 87). Furthermore, the French ‘courant’, ‘se cachant’ and ‘repenant sa course’ of Example 8 can almost graphically reproduce the semiotic alternation of ‘the drives and their stases in a motility that is as full of movement as it is regulated’ (Kristeva 1984: 25). Gladys’s motion also emerges in another part of the text where, during a visit to the mother’s house, she is described as a

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<sup>15</sup> To underline the importance of marginal positions in feminist discourse it is worth reporting how Jane Gallop positions the margins in relation to the centre and to feminist criticism: ‘the centre defines itself as good and relegates its others, presumed bad, to the margins. But in feminist (or postmodernist) discourse the centre tends to be suspect, that is, bad, and the margins have the moral authority’ (Gallop quoted in Shands 1999: 17).

‘transient visitor’ (‘Sugar’: 222) who ‘began [...] jerky speeches’ (‘Sugar’: 222). In French the adjective ‘éphémère’ (‘Le Sucre’: 31) for ‘transient’ and the expression ‘se lançait par à-coups’ (‘Le Sucre’: 32), for ‘began [...] jerky speeches’ evoke the semiotic hammering rhythm of the *chora* articulating oscillations and alternations of ‘movements and their ephemeral stases’ (Kristeva 1984: 25). Movement also characterizes the mother figure who, trapped in a series of juxtapositions, is associated by Byatt with ‘working women in Dutch streets’ (‘Sugar’: 235). The verbal attribute ‘working’ is rendered in French with the relative clause ‘qui s’activent’ (‘Le Sucre’: 49) which turns a simple verb ‘to work’ into a verb expressing activity, agility and energy. Energy and mobility also emerge in Example 1 in French, where the adverbial expression of movement ‘sans arrêt’, depicting the inexhaustible maternal passion for storytelling, replaces the temporal expression ‘all the time’.

The question of style posed at the beginning of this section can now be addressed. As the mother’s stories of open spaces are retold by the daughter to the reader, they inevitably help the child acquire spatial awareness in maternal and feminine terms. Are these terms literally echoed by the narrator? Do they inform Byatt’s style? In the light of what Byatt reveals in the French preface to ‘Le Sucre’, it seems that the French translation plays a special role here. As the first section of this chapter explains, the French preface reveals that the mother figure had a ‘secret’ literary role. Given this anticipation, French readers expect to find out more about this role in the French text. Unlike the English original, the French translation satisfies the readers’ expectations by enhancing the mother’s aesthetic role in the text and impact upon Byatt’s style. As seen in Example 8, the French text does in fact rephrase important sentences so as to evoke the mother’s voice and loquacious discourse. But the mother’s narrative style is not only generous and verbose. It is also ‘beautifully’ and ‘floridly’ (Example 1) expressed. But what does Byatt mean by ‘beautifully’ and, especially, ‘floridly’? ‘Floridly’ indicates a style of writing ‘profusely adorned [...] in ornaments or flowers of

rhetoric'.<sup>16</sup> Once again, the French translator opts for a literal solution and renders 'floridly' with the idiomatic expression 'avec panache', namely as rhetorically adorned as the meaning that it embodies. The French 'avec panache', evoking the flamboyant effect produced by feathers decorating a helmet, is not only a sign of artistic abilities in translation. It reveals the translator's intention to give voice and body to the mother's language. If the mother's style was beautiful and florid, she must have used rhetorical ornaments, idioms and metaphors.

This figurative and imaginative style of the mother's stories is also enhanced by the description of her narrative style in Example 7, where the French translates 'graphic style' with 'style imagé'. While 'graphic' means detailed and descriptive, 'imagé' means adorned with images and metaphors. The meaning is not completely altered because metaphors can be as imaginative as they are descriptive.<sup>17</sup> The point is that, once again, the French translator coherently highlights the figurative style of the mother's stories by using an adjective, namely 'imagé', which is as close to 'avec panache' as it is to all the colourful metaphors attributed to the mother. Apart from 'se lançait par à-coups' and 'perdait le fil' in Example 8, which, as we have seen, can be claimed to belong indirectly to the mother, other maternal expressions are metaphorically rendered in French. For example '«Ton père a fumé comme un sapeur pendant deux ans après la mort de Sylvia», dit un jour ma mère' ('Le Sucre': 39) and '«Je faillis tourner les talons et rentrer à la maison», disait toujours ma mère' ('Le Sucre': 41) report directly the mother's words in the text. As can be seen, they contain two vivid metaphors, namely 'fumer come un sapeur' and 'tourner les talons', which

<sup>16</sup> *Oxford English Dictionary Online*

(<http://www.oed.com.ezp2.bath.ac.uk/view/Entry/71886?redirectedFrom=floridly#eid>) [accessed on 2 October 2011].

<sup>17</sup> The English text, however, insists more on the descriptive than on the metaphorical aspect of the mother's narrative style. This is for example underlined by the verb 'to expatiate' that, as we have seen, is used for the mother. In addition to all the other denotative and connotative meanings explained above, 'to expatiate' signifies: 'to speak or write at some length; to enlarge; to be copious in description or discussion' (*Oxford English Dictionary Online*, <http://www.oed.com.ezp2.bath.ac.uk/search?searchType=dictionary&q=expatiate>, accessed on 2 October 2011, my italics).

are absent from the English original: “‘Your father smoked terribly for two years after Sylvia died,” my mother said once’ (‘Sugar’: 228) and “‘I nearly just turned round and went home,” my mother always said’ (‘Sugar’: 229).

The presence of extra metaphors in translation does not contradict the mother’s spatial imagery, it enriches it by adding extra dimensions to the interspatiality of the French text. Metaphors are, in fact, spatial devices because, as their etymological root proves,<sup>18</sup> they deal ‘with movement, with a carrying over or transportation of elements from one area to another’ (Shands 1999: 25). They are, therefore, means of transport and, at the same time, ‘spatializing space’ (Shands 1999: 25). Their potential springs not only from the link between one thing or place and another, but also from the correlation between two different ideological and cognitive areas. For instance ‘perdait le fil’ recalls embroidery, namely one of the most traditionally praised feminine artistic expressions. ‘Tourner les talons’ and ‘se lançait par à-coup’ are corporeal expressions which evoke movement and the human body. The metaphorical flamboyance of the feathers in ‘avec panache’ produces colour, one of the most fundamental ingredients of the *chora*, which continues to attract and affect the French narrator. In French Byatt’s own language is as figurative and concrete<sup>19</sup> as her mother’s. The metaphors that can be found in translation reveal the narrator’s absolute fascination with the mother’s imaginative and ‘oceanic’ style (Shands 1999: 26). The mother’s imaginary spatialization can even be metaphorically compared with feminism, which ‘in its exploration of geographical and discursive terrains, employs an imagery of spaces, boundaries, circles, and cycles, as well as imagery of movement within or out of limited spaces in ways that recall those of our foremother Eve, as seen in her dream’ (Shands 1999: 1). One last set of examples will now be considered to show the interspatial and metaphorical dimension of the French text:

<sup>18</sup> Kerstin W. Shands claims that: “‘Metaphor’ comes from the Greek *meta*, over, and *pherein*, to bear’ (1999: 25).

<sup>19</sup> Lakoff and Johnson (1980) show that metaphors, which reflect our ordinary conceptual system, are not arbitrary or abstract. They, on the contrary, have ‘a basis in our *physical* and cultural experience. [They] [...] can vary from culture to culture’ (14, my italics).

**Example 9a**

Barnet [...] spent [...] years confined to a wheelchair. ('Sugar': 221)

Barnet [...] passa [...] son existence cloué dans son fauteuil roulant. ('Le Sucre': 29)

**Example 9b**

He seems to have [...] had no thought for their future other than that they should be incorporated [...] into the family business. ('Sugar': 220)

Il ne semble pas avoir [...] nourri pour leur avenir d'autre projet que leur incorporation [...] dans l'affaire de famille. ('Le Sucre': 28-29)

**Example 9c**

Until she died she went over and over moments of solecism. ('Sugar': 223)

Jusqu'à sa mort elle ressassa des impairs. ('Le Sucre': 33)

**Example 9d**

He observed [...] his own grim red-headed skull [...] without gentleness [...] without evasion. ('Sugar': 236)

Il observait [...] con crâne roux rébarbatif [...] sans douceur [...] sans faux-fuyants. ('Le Sucre': 51)

**Example 9e**

He had the idea that he might get well enough to go round. ('Sugar': 237)

Il caressait l'idée de se rétablir assez pour aller faire le tour. ('Le Sucre': 52)

**Example 9f**

After she had gone, my mother spoke with concentrated and sharply expressed distaste of the vulgarity. ('Sugar': 223)

Après son départ, ma mère, d'un ton acerbe, blâma avec une répugnance concentrée la vulgarité. ('Le Sucre': 32)

We can observe that the French version contains metaphors which are not present in English: 'cloué dans', 'nourri', 'ressassa', 'faux-fuyants' and 'acerbe'. These new metaphors do not only embellish the text, they amplify the interspatial dimension of 'Le Sucre' and the mother's imaginative, poetic and prosaic style. They depart from the original text, yet they remain faithful to Byatt's vision of metaphors, which she depicts as 'flowers', in her critical work *Passions of the*



*Mind* (1991). Like flowers, metaphors blossom into images within images, ‘*les unes dans les autres*’ (Genette quoted in Byatt 1991: 13, author’s italics), which, like the *chora*, engender adjacent ideas and contiguous spaces. Byatt’s fascination with the spatial and creative qualities of metaphor emerges also in a critical essay about Wallace Stevens. Byatt endorses Stevens’s creative notion of ‘resemblance’ (1978b: 369) which, as she explains, can be found in nature as well as in metaphor. Nature, metaphor and artistic creativity share a ‘universe of reproduction’ which is not deployed along ‘an assembly line’ but which is founded upon ‘an *incessant* creation’ (Stevens quoted in Byatt 1978b: 370, my italics). Metaphors are therefore as concrete and physical as nature (and flowers) and they represent the very essence of Byatt’s style: their engendering properties make metaphorical principles the feminine receptacle of the mother’s stories and of Byatt’s literary production. Metaphors are the vehicle of the mother’s cognitive landscape and of her unconscious<sup>20</sup> and dual thinking. They are also the expression of an artistic language always in transition and in motion, simultaneously here and there.<sup>21</sup> This language bears hidden intersubjective traits that evoke both the transitional space and the semiotic *chora*. It allows the mother and the daughter to be in two different places (open and enclosed) at the same time and lets them ‘perceive identity and difference simultaneously and [be] dependent on each other’ (Byatt 1991: 15).

#### 4.5 Conclusion

‘Le Sucre’ appeared in a French cultural context which revolved around the autobiography/autofiction debate. This context was congenial to the text and had

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<sup>20</sup> Lacan, who greatly influenced Kristeva’s thought, explained the metaphorical mechanisms in terms of Freud’s process of subconscious condensation: ‘the metaphoric process, the submersion of one term underneath another, provides the general model for the unconscious symptom: the term having “fallen below the bar”, becomes repressed, and the signifier which replaces it or becomes its symptom’ (Grosz 1990: 100).

<sup>21</sup> Kristeva inherits her theory of the relativity of space partially from Heidegger’s *Dasein* (the subject): ‘Dasein understands its here in terms of its environmental there ... Dasein, in accordance with its spatiality, is proximally never here but there; from this There it comes back to its Here, and it comes back to its here only in the manner that it interprets its concerned Being-towards ... in terms of what is ready-to-hand over there’ (Heidegger quoted in Holenstein 1999: 68).

an impact on the way the English original was translated. Byatt's preface to the translation addresses issues relating to this debate and this leads us to think that both the preface and the translation were inspired by the debate *and* by the role attributed to the mother, psychologically, emotionally and artistically. The almost unexpected, yet crucial, space devoted to the mother in 'Sugar' must have encouraged Chevalier, the French translator, to study this particular character in depth. Chevalier was conscious of the fascination that Byatt's father had for his daughter both as a judge and as an accurate teller and this emerges in an interview of the French translator with Byatt (Chevalier 2003: 5). Despite this and inspired by the French cultural context, Chevalier juxtaposed the mother with Doubrovsky and her unorthodox personality with his challenges to Lejeune's traditional theories on autobiographical writing. Hence, by granting more attention to the mother's role and style, the French translation illuminates specific formal aspects of Byatt's narrative which constitute her style. Unlike what traditional autobiography prescribes, the mother in the French text does not talk directly and overtly about herself and this reflects Byatt's dislike of discussing her work as strictly personal or autobiographical. The mother offers biographical information of other family members whose lives inform the content of this short story. These lives are also forms of expression of Byatt's mother's self and enable her to shift continuously her positioning and focalization.

This mode of fictionalizing her self as a series of boundary shifts and renegotiations through connections with other prismatic subjectivities goes hand in hand in the French text with an innovative (typically female) approach to autobiographical writing. Teresa de Lauretis considered the latter as 'feminist' because of its being extremely courageous, eccentric (in the sense of marginal) and mobile. This mobility emerges from

a dis-placement and a self-displacement: leaving or giving up a place that is safe, that is 'home' – physically, emotionally, linguistically, epistemologically – for another place that is unknown and risky, that is not only emotionally but conceptually other: a place of discourse from which

speaking and thinking are at best tentative, uncertain and unguaranteed. (de Lauretis 1980: 138)

The French mother's spatial stories foreground 'constant crossing of the border' (de Lauretis 1980: 138), constant exploration of the self and constant experimentation with language and, in so doing, they evoke Doubrovsky's intention to offer 'le langage d'une aventure à l'aventure du langage, hors sagesse et hors syntaxe du roman' (quoted in de Montremy 2002: 62). The French version sheds light on interspatial fluidity and spatial associations typical of the mother's language and style. It focuses on the mother's humble intergenerational negotiations and intense desires to explore imaginatively other spaces and worlds.<sup>22</sup> The interspatiality and interrelationality that emerge from her stories in French go beyond Lejeune's 'récit rétrospectif en prose qu'une personne réelle fait de sa propre existence, lorsqu'elle met l'accent sur sa vie individuelle, en particulier sur l'histoire de sa personnalité' (Lejeune 1975: 14). The French mother's chimerical lies go beyond light-hearted *mélanges* with fiction and 'la mise en fiction de la vie personnelle' (Lejeune quoted in de Montremy 2002: 62). They invite reflection on the self, the unconscious and the m/other. The fragmentation and complexity of the mother's stories, enhanced by the French version, reflect playful experimentation with temporal intersections typical of Doubrovsky and other autofictional writers who embrace 'le découpage chronologique propre au récit autobiographique en tant qu'il est sa forme naturelle' (Molkou 2002: 161). These traits sharpen the difference with the father and place the mother in opposition to his approach to narrative discourse, an approach constructed along the lines of the traditional autobiographical canon (as prescribed by Lejeune). Unlike the father, the mother does not talk exclusively about herself or her glorious childhood. She does not construct a myth of herself or her 'Arcadian' past and pleasures ('Sugar': 231). Her stories are not a stubborn effort to comply with rigid structural guidelines nor do they express a sense of

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<sup>22</sup> Genette, for example, talking about 'métaphores spatiales', claims that 'il s'agit d'un espace *connoté*, manifesté plutôt que désigné, parlant plutôt que parlé, qui se trahit dans la métaphore comme l'inconscient se livre dans un rêve ou dans un lapsus' (1966: 103, author's italics).

glory and pride (unknown to women).<sup>23</sup> By enhancing Byatt's source of artistic inspiration, the French version stresses the importance of the mother-daughter bond, a maternal bond which is only partially explored by Doubrovsky. 'Le Sucre' shortens the proxemic distance between these female characters. It also enhances their affective relationship and the iconicity of the enclosed space of the house as a synonym for the womb and the mother. Similarly to the Italian translation of 'Sugar', 'Le Sucre' uncovers the mother's feminine approach to storytelling which combines oceanic drives, desires for freedom, movement and boundary violation. The next chapter will examine other maternal spaces which represent the most prominent features of the Italian translation of *The Autobiography of My Mother* (1996), by Caribbean author Jamaica Kincaid. Unlike 'Le Sucre', Kincaid's autobiography will propel us into the dark and gloomy realms of precipices and abysses.

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<sup>23</sup> De Lauretis (1980) claims that women's writing is not characterised by proud, glorious or nostalgic tones because, being always excluded from history, they have nothing to remember.